

Gendering Knowledge in Discourse on Japan's Herbivore Boys

By

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the public discourse about a group of Japanese men called *sōshokudanshi*, or herbivore boys. Herbivore boys are commonly depicted as young men in their twenties and thirties who are heterosexual, yet uninterested in such heterosexually normative activities as dating and sex. They are often described by journalists as androgynous and passive, more concerned with consumption than the production-oriented masculinities of Japan's older generation. At stake in discourse is precisely this tension between Japan's older and newer masculinities, between conservative gender ideology and the new challenges young men present to gender roles and heterosexuality.

After their introduction into public discourse, *sōshokudanshi* sparked national attention, propelled by feelings of outrage and indignation at these young, allegedly irresponsible men who neither show interest in marriage nor in holding down full-time jobs, the hallmark of corporate masculinity under 1980s Japan. In refusing to adhere to the strictly delineated lifestages that Japanese society expects its members to follow, herbivore boys problematize naturalized assumptions about gender. At the same time, they draw attention to the failure of hegemonic masculinity, the dominant form of manhood which increasingly appears outdated in light of women's growing autonomy and the recent emphasis on lifestyle-based identities.

Yet despite widespread media attention, few if any young men would call themselves herbivore boys. Rather, *sōshokudanshi* is a label created in and through discourse by older members of Japanese society. By analyzing public discourses in the mass media, this thesis argues that older Japanese men construct herbivore boys as a scapegoat on which to cast blame for Japan's low birthrate and stagnating economy, while simultaneously excluding young men from participating in the discussion. It further suggests that the conversation about *sōshokudanshi* is a site where knowledge is commodified per the general trend in advanced capitalist economies.

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## Introduction

In 2011, an article titled “No Sex, Please, We’re Young Japanese Men” appeared on the website of the Wall Street Journal: Japan, a magazine that targets a cosmopolitan English and Japanese-speaking audience. The article describes the disinterest in “real-life sex” among a growing segment of Japan’s population, a group of young men called *sōshokudanshi*, or “herbivore boys” (Tomikawa 2011).<sup>1</sup> This group’s sexual behavior appears to be at the center of Japan’s latest troubles, including an economy in recession and a low birth rate of 1.25, well under the number of 2.08 that Japan needs to sustain its population (Kitazume 2006). Herbivore boys refrain from dating, marriage, and full-time employment in the economy, and for this reason CEOs, writers, and a variety of experts describe herbivore boys as a social malaise, juxtaposing them with carnivores, or men who pursue women, sex, and financial and occupational success (Yamaoka 2011).

As subjects implicated in numerous controversial issues underpinning the socioeconomic and gender status quo, herbivore boys offer insights into the sustainability of a value system that privileges older heterosexual men over all other groups in Japanese society. Although discourse about herbivore boys is often hostile to young men, the entire discussion reflects the interests of numerous speakers with different reasons and goals for considering the subject of *sōshokudanshi*.

My goal in this thesis is to evaluate and critique this ongoing conversation about herbivore boys, or what I call *sōshokudanshi discourse*. As such, I am not interested probing an actual population of herbivore boys. Instead, this thesis will make two primary arguments, both of which revolve around the construction of young men as herbivore boys without their consent or input. First, this thesis will suggest that interlocutors—journalists, writers, bloggers, and self-

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I italicize *sōshokudanshi* when referring to the word itself. I keep *sōshokudanshi* in normal font when referencing individuals, the group, or the phenomenon.

described “experts”—construct herbivore boys as a discursive scapegoat on which to cast blame for Japan’s low birthrate and stagnating economy.<sup>2</sup> Second, it will contend that sōshokudanshi discourse represents a site where knowledge is commodified per the general trend in advanced capitalist economies

These criticisms leveled at herbivore boys are by no means new. Japan’s older generation regularly accuses other groups of young men and women of similar transgressions. Yet even within this broad category of “youth,” herbivore boys occupy a special niche deserving of closer scrutiny. Largely due to its social stigma, young men do not identify as sōshokudanshi. Nonetheless, women and older men in particular use herbivore boys as a discursive tool to address their anxieties and insecurities, as well as to maintain heterosexual gender boundaries. An examination of herbivore boys in the Japanese media reveals the gendered nature of knowledge production, yet leaves the possibility of a shift to a more open construction of masculinity.

Here, my understanding of “masculinity” is heavily informed by scholarship of R. W. Connell. For Connell, masculinity is not only a location within the nexus of gender relations, but also the associated practices and effects that men and women (re)produce as they interact with this location (Connell 2005: 71). Masculinity is thus not simply a set of ideas about manhood. Rather, masculinit(ies) are multiple and shifting positions inscribed within actions and upon the human body.

#### Definition of Sōshokudanshi

On a basic level, popular public discourse represents sōshokudanshi as 1) young men in their 20s and 30s who are 2) heterosexual, but largely uninterested in such heteronormative activities as dating, sex, and marriage (Big Reporter Namiki 2009; [www.so-shoku.net](http://www.so-shoku.net) 2013) and

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<sup>2</sup> I use the word “interlocutor” in reference to participants’ roles in discourse.

3) are adverse to competition of any sort (Asahi Shimbun 2010; Okuda 2009: 3-4). Most Japanese journalists, bloggers, writers, and other self-described experts on herbivore boys appear to agree on these criteria, though they often disagree about other characteristics. Some of the more debatable qualities frequently ascribed to herbivore boys are a kind or gentle spirit (Morioka 2011: 18), a straightforward or serious attitude (Fukasawa 2009a), and a passive disposition (Non-No 2008: 106). Other accounts depict *sōshokudanshi* as part-time workers (www.so-shoku.net 2013) who maintain platonic romances or friends-only relationships with women. Some even specify that herbivore boys are fashion conscious (Fukasawa 2009a; Suzuki 2012), enjoy cooking and handicrafts (Asahi Shimbun 2009; Big Reporter Namiki 2009), refrain from smoking or drinking (Fukasawa 2009b; Yomiuri Shimbun 2009), are good listeners (www.so-shoku.net 2013), and like to visit sweets shops (Nishida 2010; Takeda 2009).<sup>3</sup>

### Language and Knowledge Production

My analysis of Japanese media draws upon a body of scholarly literature that scrutinizes language's role in knowledge production. People often assume that language serves a purely descriptive function, characterizing preexisting and "natural" facts or features that exist independently in the world. Yet philosophers, anthropologists, and feminists point out that language generates knowledge by giving it meaning and relevance.

Michel Foucault illustrates principle in "A History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction." He argues that discourse constructs sex, whether as a shameful and forbidden pleasure or as a fundamental truth of Western science. Neither the processes nor the products of discourse are innocent, but laden with power from innumerable and shifting nodes on a web that is variously inhabited by people, apparatuses, and institutions (Foucault 1990: 96). Power and

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<sup>3</sup> In Japan, smoking and drinking are masculine activities. Sweets shops serve cake, candy, and a variety of pastries. Frequenting sweets shops is gendered a feminine activity.

discourse are inextricably linked in that “power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law” (Foucault 1990: 83). Yet power and discourse are fluid and unpredictable, double-edged strategies that may impede the very people who develop them (Foucault 1990: 101).

Indeed, language generates the very partial realities from which people claim to extract knowledge, as well as the people who engage in acts of knowing: “*It is the discourse that makes the person who invokes it look like its agent*” (Inoue 2006: 22, emphasis author's). If language is always a part of culture, defining what counts as knowledge and what is worth knowing, then such social constructs as gender and race are created in and through language. They are multiple, fragmented, and lack an objective existence apart from their limited manifestations within discourse. Likewise, discourse does not describe herbivore boys, it produces them as knowable subjects.

Within sōshokudanshi discourse, the primary producers of knowledge are rendered invisible by what Feminist Donna Haraway calls the “god trick,” the illusion that knowledge originates in monolithic Reality (1988). The speaking subject (i.e. older Japanese men) merely relays this unmediated, unadulterated information to the public. In actuality, such knowledge is highly ideological, generated by patriarchy’s gaze. This gaze allows privileged speakers to claim access to all-encompassing knowledge while masking their role in the process of knowledge production (Haraway 1988: 581).

A look at surveys about herbivore boys demonstrates how Haraway’s god trick is particularly relevant, reinforces the centrality of language to knowledge production, and suggests that sōshokudanshi do not exist as a population apart from discourse.

Survey Says: Do Sōshokudanshi Exist?



In this section, I critique the surveys that interlocutors cite as proof of an herbivorous population. I show that the available evidence is both circumstantial and the product of badly conducted research. While many of these surveys attempt to produce the kind of locationless, sweeping knowledge that Haraway effectively discredits, the surveys largely fail even by the standards of scientific objectivity. Instead, their flawed execution supports Foucault's argument that knowledge is constructed through discourse. By basing their claims about herbivore boys on these surveys, and by instantiating these claims as knowledge, interlocutors build their body of knowledge on a shaky foundation.

The assertion that "herbivore boys are on the rise" thus reveals the "god trick" as a ruse, an act that only works because the audience wants to believe in its magic. For this reason, few object to the way herbivore boys are discursively constructed according to and through male-centered heteronormative dictates. As I will argue later, many Japanese unquestioningly accept the existence of herbivore boys because along with other youth, *sōshokudanshi* provide a convenient scapegoat for many of Japan's socioeconomic ills.

One commonly referenced survey, conducted in 2009 by the think tank M1 • F1, asked a series of questions to a group of 20-34 year-old men drawn from three prefectures in the Tokyo Metropolitan area. The survey then classified these young men as *sōshokudanshi* based on their responses. Two problems immediately surface concerning this survey's methodology. First, the survey provides no justification for why its particular configuration of traits constitutes *sōshokudanshi*. Defining *sōshokudanshi* is important, especially considering the numerous and widely differing opinions about herbivore boys. Yet the survey employs an arbitrarily assembled group of characteristics, including one I have never seen echoed elsewhere: "Sōshokudanshi will often keep in touch with the media." Assuming that to "keep in touch" refers to paying attention,

any number of other groupings of young men—or young women for that matter—could fit this description, especially given the pervasiveness of the media in Japan.

Second, the survey imposes the label *sōshokudanshi*, irrespective of what respondents think. Because people are categorized rather than asked to identify, the survey found a high prevalence of *sōshokudanshi* within Japanese society: 60 percent of respondents aged 20-22 are herbivorous (M1 • F1 Research 2009). This figure is questionable at best, both because several informants suggested that such an identity is an affront to a man's "pride," and also given the difficulty of finding self-identified *sōshokudanshi* in Japan.<sup>4</sup>

Other surveys show a similar lack of sophistication. A Yahoo! survey asks respondents a simple yes or no question: Do they know any *sōshokudanshi*? The high number of "yes" responses (60 percent of n = 26233) may reflect a situation I encountered in Japan: The people who were introduced to me as *sōshokudanshi* did not see themselves in this way (Yahoo! Japan 2009). Like the first survey, the Yahoo! survey does not define "*sōshokudanshi*," leaving its definition up to respondents who doubtless hold differing ideas about herbivore boys. Yahoo! further asks respondents to place the label *sōshokudanshi* on unsuspecting others. This practice is consistent with the way older Japanese men and women contain and manage the behavior of young people by categorizing them into easily identifiable boxes.

While the Yahoo! survey does not include any information on the people who participated, a third survey on "marriage hunting," provides a little more background by breaking respondents down according to gender.<sup>5</sup> This survey, conducted by the insurance company Lifenet, asks men and women to specify whether they would prefer an herbivorous or a

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<sup>4</sup> According to Karen Nakamura, a Professor of Anthropology at Yale University, one of her students initially set out to study *sōshokudanshi*, but was forced to change or revise her topic because like me, she couldn't find any *sōshokudanshi*.

<sup>5</sup> *Konkatsu*, or marriage hunting, refers to a regimen where women and sometimes men pay to engage in structured interaction with prospective marriage partners.

carnivorous spouse. Over 60 percent of the women who responded prefer “herbivorous” men over “carnivorous” men (Lifenet 2009).

Another survey, conducted in 2009 by the dating agency Partner Agent, is slightly more detailed in its questions, but still does not contribute much to defining or describing an actual population of *sōshokudanshi*. The survey also asks about *nikushokujoshi* or carnivore girls, herbivore boys’ counterpart (discussed further in Chapter Three). The survey’s questions include: “Do you know the words *sōshokudanshi* and *nikushokujoshi*?” “Are there *sōshokudanshi* or *nikushokujoshi* around you?” “What do you think about *sōshokudanshi* or *nikushokujoshi*?” and finally “What are your reasons for going out with/marrying a *sōshokudanshi* or *nikushokujoshi*?” (Partner Agent 2009). Clearly, these surveys fail to measure the existence of *sōshokudanshi* as a group, self-identified or otherwise. Combined with the conspicuous absence of *sōshokudanshi* voices in *sōshokudanshi* discourse (also discussed in Chapter Three), this supports the conclusion that herbivore boys are a signifier without a signified, a subject created within the realm of discourse.

Interlocutors in *sōshokudanshi* discourse sometimes cite other circumstantial evidence to support their claims about herbivore boys’ existence. Some maintain that *sōshokudanshi* are increasing in number, pointing to statistics from the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research that show 60 percent of single Japanese men are not in relationships with members of the opposite sex (2011: 10).<sup>6</sup> Yet any number of other explanations could account for this number. For example, rather than being herbivore boys, youth who occupy marginal positions in the Japanese economy may be unable to afford the high emotional, fiscal, and time investments involved in romantic relationships.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research defines “relationship” as heterosexual. It apparently does not consider same-sex relationships to be a viable variable.

Again, none of this proof directly demonstrates the presence of herbivore boys within Japanese society. While interlocutors use these surveys as a scientific account of the One True Reality, such information does not count as knowledge, at least according to the criteria set out by patriarchy's impartial, locationless gaze. Secondhand accounts, missing demographic information from respondents, and arbitrary groupings of *sōshokudanshi* characteristics sans explanation—all are necessary parts of scientifically objective knowledge, and all are conspicuously absent. When surveys are used in this capacity, they demonstrate the constructed nature of knowledge: non-existent groups are projected into social reality through a scientific discourse that ignores its own rules and methodological standards.

Admittedly, some of herbivore boys' alleged behaviors match behavioral trends among young men. Namely, a growing number of young men no longer aspire to full-time employment (Honda 2006: 155), while others use beautification technologies (Miller 2006: 127), and remain single (NIPSSR 2012).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, when older men and women subsume these characteristics under the label "*sōshokudanshi*," they artificially group, define, and contain young men within an identity that young men themselves reject. Herbivorous behaviors may exist, but herbivore boys themselves have no basis in social reality.

Why do older men and women claim that *sōshokudanshi* are a growing population within Japan (MyNavi 2013; Yamaoka 2011; Yomiuri Shimbun 2011)? There are two reasons for this, each tied to one of the primary questions I address in this thesis. For now, I will briefly articulate my arguments, saving the evidence for Chapters Two and Three.

First, interlocutors capitalize on the topic of *sōshokudanshi* in order to net publicity and make money. By claiming that herbivore boys are on the rise, interlocutors increase the value of

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<sup>7</sup> Not only is there a growing trend toward later marriages for both men and women, Japan is currently witnessing a sharp increase in the number of men and women who have never married (NIPSSR 2012).

sōshokudanshi as a knowledge-commodity, generating interest—in both senses of the word—for and from the public attention paid to this nonexistent group. Second, a widespread phenomenon is easy to blame, and herbivore boys serve precisely this function when interlocutors construct them as scapegoats and discursive decoys or distractions.

René Girard provides a useful account of the process of scapegoating. He argues that scapegoats offer a convenient means of excising culpability from within a group. When a cultural or social order faces a perceived threat, its members may single out an individual or subgroup, designating this minority as the source of whatever problem seemingly plagues the group as a whole (Girard 1986: 15). Now a scapegoat, the individual or subgroup takes on the group's sins, and in this process, the rest of the group is rendered blameless (Girard 1986: 43).

As I will shortly argue, sōshokudanshi adhere to this definition of “scapegoat” when they draw attention away from older men, many of who rigidly adhere to an outdated model of masculinity that has rendered them incapable of rectifying or responding to Japan's stagnating economy. Within public discourse, herbivore boys assume their fathers' sins, absolving older men of responsibility for the conflicts and crises that have rocked Japan since the early 1990s. The young men so labeled are metaphorically cast out, and their alleged irresponsibility serves as further justification for denying them access to positions of social privilege and maintaining their marginalized status relative to salarymen.

### Methodology

My scholarly interest in herbivore boys and my choice of sōshokudanshi as a research topic springs from the particular affinity I feel with the young men so labeled. As someone who felt heterosexual desire but never really acted upon it—nor had much interest in doing so—I empathize with the way young Japanese men are pressured to date, have sex, and marry, despite

their profound disinterest in doing so. This sympathy colors my approach to the topic of herbivore boys, and I found myself approaching *sōshokudanshi* from the standpoint of the young men. From the outset, I was critical of the opinion expressed by older men and women, and while I have tried to mitigate the way my initial bias affects my treatment of the topic, this thesis remains the product of an anthropologist who feels more in common with these young Japanese men and their sexuality than with their critics.

While I initially set out to meet and communicate with *sōshokudanshi*, hoping perhaps to compare experiences, for the reasons already elaborated, I was forced to change my methodology from ethnography to a discourse analysis of Japanese media.<sup>8</sup> To this end, I draw upon a diverse body of popular and semi-scholarly texts—including self-help books, novels, Japanese comics, women’s magazines, and newspaper articles, online news articles, blogs, websites.

I acquired my sources in a number of ways. I located and purchased most of the books, novels, comics, and women’s magazines by searching the websites of such Japanese retailers as Amazon.co.jp. I found the newspaper articles through the University of Kansas’ library, which holds a subscription to two databases containing scanned copies of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the *Asahi Shimbun*, both prominent national newspapers. I turned up many of the online news articles, blogs, and websites by searching for such terms as *sōshokudanshi*, *sōshokukeidanshi*, *ojōman*, and their variants in such online search engines as Google.co.jp and Yahoo.co.jp. Others I discovered by cross-referencing the above sources to find new ones, and still others I found

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks to my committee member, Dr. Carlos Nash, for meeting with me over the course of two semesters and helping to refine my understanding of discourse analysis.

with the help of the librarians at the University of Kansas.<sup>9</sup> Over the course of two years, I regularly repeated and refined these searches to look for newly published items.

I supplement this approach with fieldwork conducted in Japan during the summer of 2012 while attending courses funded by a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC) in Yokohama. The IUC program is flexible, adapting itself to the specific needs of each graduate student. I was thus able to use class time and activities to explore Japanese perceptions of *sōshokudanshi*. My informants for this study consisted primarily of professors and college students who are affiliated with the IUC.

Additionally, my research data include two semi-structured interviews. My first interviewee was Professor Masahiro Morioka of Osaka Prefecture University, who later directed me to the second interviewee, to whom I will refer using the pseudonym Imamura.<sup>10</sup> Upon meeting this second individual, I discovered that contrary to Morioka's intimations, Imamura does not self-identify as an herbivore boy. My encounter with Imamura was the clearest example of a setback that I faced during my fieldwork: I quickly found that Imamura and other young men are unwilling to claim the *sōshokudanshi* identity, in part due to the unstated social stigma attached to herbivore boys—one also attached to other young men who perform gender through practices of consumption.

### Creative Work and Lifestyle-Based Masculinities

In her discussion of the marketing strategies used in a genre of Japanese television called “trendy dramas,” Gabriella Lukács writes that lifestyle “suggests to consumers that they can freely choose social selves for themselves while excluding as a basis for identity the position

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<sup>9</sup> Thanks especially to Michiko Ito for her substantial assistance in locating various articles and resources.

<sup>10</sup> A warm thanks to the IUC instructor Makiko Ohashi, who went above and beyond her teaching responsibilities by devoting extra time to help me practice and prepare for these interviews.

they hold within the systems of production” (2010: 8). Lifestyle is a term that aptly suits a generation that defines itself through consumption, but feels no particular loyalty to class. Undoubtedly, lifestyle has become the guiding marker of identity among young men, and not just *sōshokudanshi*. Herbivore boys are but one example of an alternative masculinity among youth who increasingly value creative work and flexible lifestyles. Other highly visible young men who participate in creative work include the Japanese boy band SMAP, formed in the late 1980s and named for the initials of its members’ names, and a more recent group of young men known as hosts. At host clubs, women pay young men—hosts—for their attention, conversation, and the fantasy of romance. Hosts compete with one another to draw in the most customers, employing beautification technologies and fashion in order to seduce female clients (Takeyama 2005: 201; 2010: 236). Both hosts and SMAP rely on the appeal of their commodified images, intangible goods that have begun to supersede tangible goods as the driving force of advanced capitalist economies (Lukács 2010: 27).

In order to convince women to spend money on them, hosts cultivate an effeminate, refined persona through a complex of practices gestures and bodily deportments (Takeyama 2010: 237-238). Similarly, SMAP initially gained its popularity not through singing, but via a comedy television show that emphasized the handsome features and developed the unique personalities of each of its members. Since then, SMAP’s albums and songs have received numerous awards and national recognition, despite widespread agreement, even among fans, that one of SMAP’s four members is incapable of carrying a tune. Because music is only part of what SMAP represents, to buy a SMAP album is to buy into the SMAP image and lifestyle.

For hosts, SMAP, and herbivore boys, the key metaphor is choice, the ability to select a social identity based on consumption patterns. As such, herbivore boys are far from the radical



outliers that some interlocutors make them out to be: They have clear continuity with other lifestyle-based masculinities and young men engaged in creative work. Like hosts and SMAP, the sōshokudanshi lifestyle is an assembly of consumption habits, including dress and demeanor, which prioritize the images that commodities project, rather than material objects per se.

## Chapter One: Historical Context and Literature Review

In this chapter, I provide some of the historical context in preparation for my discussion of sōshokudanshi discourse in Chapters Two and Three. I highlight how positions of social, political, and economic power continue to be monopolized by older men who came of age during or prior to Japan's economic downturn. I further explain how young men and women who value creative work are deprived by societal and structural configurations that marginalize them and leave them vulnerable to the whims of market forces. This discussion of Japan's political economy will inform Chapter Two, where I examine two key figures in sōshokudanshi discourse in order to uncover how knowledge is commodified.

### The Rise and Fall of *Japan Inc.*

In the 1980s, Japan entered a period of growth that was astounding when one takes into account Japan's devastation during World War II. Close collaboration among industry, the state, and the educational system earned Japan the moniker *Japan Inc.* (Yoda 2006b: 29), and collectively Japan Inc. produced what many today still call an "economic miracle." Because of its recovery, Japan suddenly found itself thrust to the forefront of the First World, eventually overtaking the European nations to rank second in the global economy in the 1980s. After postwar attempts to modernize and catch up to the West, social commentators and politicians hailed this development as proof that Japan had defeated the West at the very game that the West itself had begun (Yoda 2006b: 34).

Although Japan's industry leaders, government officials, and the general public thought they had discovered a formula that made capitalism sustainable, this belief began to crumble after a depression shook Japan's economy in the beginning of the 1990s. At first economists dismissed the recession as a brief phase that would soon vanish and be forgotten, but as the 21<sup>st</sup>

century approached, both experts and the public realized that the economic slump was not temporary. People searched for the reason behind Japan Inc.'s failure, and close scrutiny revealed that the entire project bore the seeds of disaster from the very start.

What critics hailed previously as stable now appeared precarious. The Japanese made bank loans and business deals “on the basis of a whistle and a handshake,” while in practice companies rewarded not ingenuity, nor talent, nor even competence, but loyalty and submission to authority (Harootunian 2006: 104). Moreover, Japan had premised its entire rise to economic prominence on a system of exploitation that squeezed labor out of predominantly male workers, who in turn relied on the unpaid labor of women in the home (Allison 1996: xx).

After the 1990s depression, even the male-dominated workplace lost much of its luster. Previously, industry and government had touted Japan's lifetime employment system—whereby men in salaried positions were guaranteed jobs until retirement—as the only one of its kind in the world. Still, the reality of lifetime employment was quite different from the ideal. A relatively small proportion of the workforce benefited from lifetime employment, and a mandatory retirement age limited how long men held their positions in the workforce (Genda 2003: 132). Although economic pressures eventually forced companies to scrap any claims to a lifetime employment policy, this change surprisingly has not benefited most young women and men, *sōshokudanshi* included, many of who continue to look for stable, well-paid employment in a market gone wrong.

#### Company Loyalty and the Structure of Company Employment

Yoda (2006a: 259) defines *loyalty* in 1980s Japan as “how accommodating [employees] were to management decisions,” and certainly companies expected and continue to expect this accommodating attitude of their workers. Tellingly, the current practice of hiring part-time

workers in lieu of regular employees discourages loyalty, but companies blame workers rather than market conditions and their own hiring practices for a lack of loyal workers. As one of many groups who fill part-time positions at companies and elsewhere, *sōshokudanshi* are castigated by society for lacking sufficient loyalty, an accusation that has its beginnings long before the birth of many young men so arraigned. During the start-up phase of Japan's postwar economic recovery, a surplus of jobs and a deficiency of qualified candidates led companies to implement strategies to prevent employees from moving elsewhere to better jobs. Companies fostered competition by dangling raises and promotions in front of workers while simultaneously socializing workers to tolerate ever-higher levels of pressure to perform (Yoda 2006a: 259-260). This system of raises, which roughly corresponded to the length of an employee's tenure, also meant that the longer an employee worked, the more he had to lose by changing employers. In addition to this stick-disguised-as-carrot approach, companies also cultivated a benevolent, paternalistic façade by guaranteeing lifetime employment, which they billed as a sign of their commitment to employees. Corporations further leveraged this commitment by insisting on reciprocal obligations from its employees, most notably by loyalty to company.

By fabricating the ideology of “company as family,” management attempted to bind workers on a personal level to their employers. Appropriating the concept *ie*—which denotes a patriarchal, “traditional” family system—companies re-designated the workplace as home and fellow workers as brothers and sisters, with management and the company playing the role of father.<sup>11</sup> Companies thus socialized Japanese men to devote themselves wholeheartedly to work in the same way that society expected men to devote themselves to the well-being of parents and

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<sup>11</sup> The definition of *ie* has changed dramatically over time. At one point, *ie* referred to a household of consanguineal, affinal, and fictive kin (e.g., apprentices) engaged in a joint venture, such as a trade or business. The Meiji Civil Code later centralized power in the head of household. Moreover, the code excluded fictive kin from membership in the *ie*. After World War II, the *ie* system was dismantled as a legal entity (Kondo 1990: 174).

the economic security of wives and children. However, as anthropologist Dorinne Kondo notes, none of this workplace socialization occurred unproblematically (1990: 203-204). While the “company as family” ideology smoothed over conflict, making discord virtually unnoticeable to those outside the corporate circle, workers and management did clash. Workers did not simply accept management’s dictates, but they actively appropriated and reinterpreted what *family* meant and thus how they expected employers to treat them (Kondo 1990: 202).

Yet “company as family” was not the only ideology deployed to produce loyal workers. To secure loyalty, companies also created a powerful analogy that implicitly compared (male) employees to Japan’s revered samurai by valorizing workers as *kigyō senshi*, or “corporate warriors.” Like samurai who dedicated themselves to a lord or cause, corporate warriors fought for the success of their employers on the battlefield of business. The “corporate warrior” rhetoric proved highly effective and pervasive, and the warrior ethos became the ideal against which other Japanese masculinities—including *sōshokudanshi*—measure themselves. Male white-collar workers in private industry, popularly known as *sarariiman* or *salarymen*, worked long and hard at their jobs, often without compensation for overtime (Dasgupta 2000: 193). Popularly credited with Japan’s “postwar miracle,” the salaryman became a social category and the standard of hegemonic masculinity, exemplifying the values of self-sacrifice, hard work, and perseverance. *Sōshokudanshi* inevitably elicit a comparison to salarymen and their hegemonic masculinity.

#### Hegemonic Masculinity and the Salaryman

While men clearly benefit from structural configurations that privilege men and masculinity over women and femininity, men’s structural privilege within society does not preclude some masculinities from benefiting at the expense of other masculinities (Connell 2005: 76-77). *Hegemonic masculinity* is a term given to the most culturally sanctioned and socially

privileged form of masculinity. Often hegemonic masculinity acts as the standard by which society evaluates all other masculinities; it is the unmarked masculinity, the version from which all differences emanate. Yet few Japanese men perfectly fit the salaryman ideal. Moreover, the salaryman concept itself has never been static or stable. Rather, the salaryman is a construct that expands and fluctuates in response to national and world events, local practices, and social contexts. In the years since Japan's recession began, the salaryman concept has increasingly taken on negative undertones: Excessive rigidity, competence only in the workplace, and impotence. The salaryman and his privileged position are fraught with internal contradictions, as Connell suggests about all masculinities (2005: 73). The salaryman's control is always partial and never total. Nevertheless, the salaryman has retained this hegemonic position among Japanese masculinities because the salaryman ideal has become integrated with the economic, social, and political structures of Japanese society.

As Anne Allison highlights in her book *Nightwork*, the salaryman lives a precarious existence (1994: 189). He is emasculated by his subservience to corporate Japan, yet during the heyday of Japan Inc. he sought to reassert his masculinity after work in a ritualized activity. Before the collapse of Japan's economic bubble, many companies paid for their workers to attend hostess clubs on a regular basis. At these hostess clubs, women used conversation and limited physical contact to make salarymen feel desirable and powerful, the type of man who can purchase sex from women.

Yet this sex never actually materialized. Rather than physical acts of intercourse, what companies bought was the illusion that hostesses desired sex from salarymen. A form of theatre, the entire charade was designed to maintain worker productivity by building up the masculine ego. Herein lies the fragility of the salaryman: He uses women as "objects" in order to prop up

his unstable sense of self-worth, yet for this to work, the salaryman must mask his dependence on women, or face emasculation all over again (Allison 1994: 166).

These three themes—money, power, and sex—define the salaryman, even as they constitute his weakness (Takeyama, personal communication, April 3, 2013). The salaryman earns a decent wage, but he is by no means extraordinary wealthy. His power is based on his privileged social position, yet this social position also renders the salaryman the servant of an impersonal economic system. Finally, the sexual and desirable self produced by the joint efforts of hostesses and salarymen would not exist without the economic transaction between hostess clubs and corporations, as well as the cooperation of hostesses who help maintain the illusion of male supremacy.

When the economic recession hit, companies could no longer afford to pay for late nights at hostess clubs. As one might imagine, when this money evaporated, so too did one of the primary pillars supporting the salarymen sense of masculine self-worth. Entering into the 1990s and the new century, the salarymen remained a privileged member of Japanese society. Nonetheless, he is caricature of what he once, the butt of national jokes, and a faded ideal that many young men now reject in favor of alternative lifestyles.

### Youth, Education, and Employment

Although historians and Japanese society credit salarymen with Japan's successes in the 1980s, that same society blames them for the economic failures of the 1990s. Culpability for Japan's prolonged recession also falls upon young men and women, whom society perceives as complacent and lax in their commitment to national success. All this blame lands on Japanese youth despite decreasing employment opportunities and the alienating effects of the Japan's educational system. Moreover, as parents and educators increasingly pressure children to

succeed academically, one commonly voiced fear is that young men, including sōshokudanshi, have given up ambition and the struggle for success altogether.

One can trace this national obsession with children's school performance to Japan's hierarchical educational system and ultimately to hiring practices under Japan Inc. (Yoda 2006a: 262). Japanese education teaches children to obey authority yet to be fiercely competitive when it comes to academics. These qualities eventually serve company interests by encouraging loyalty while preventing worker solidarity.

Placement tests determine the level of preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college to which a child and his or her parents can aspire, and a school's ranking means the difference between a prestigious position and a marginal job. In recession-era Japan, a school's ranking can mean the difference between a job after college and unemployment.

After struggling through the rigors of "examination hell"—a period of time when young men and women study for Japan's incredibly competitive college entrance exams (Yoda 2006b: 40)—and navigating the requirements of their universities, graduates enter the job market only to find a conspicuous absence of opportunities for stable, well-paid positions. Unfortunately for recent college graduates in Japan, most government efforts to address unemployment focus almost exclusively on accommodating older and middle-aged workers (Genda 2003: 131-132), and companies reserve their few entry-level openings for graduates of top-echelon schools. Thus competition is fierce even after young people have graduated from universities.

After investing energy and money in their children, Japanese parents often expect their sons to obtain full-time positions, and their daughters to meet and marry men with steady incomes. However, many young women see marriage as restricting their freedom (Tokuhiro 2010: 131), while young men view corporate work as fundamentally unsatisfying, as simply a



doorway to a monotonous life of small rewards. Instead, young men and women work at part-time jobs while pursuing or seeking out their passions.

Japanese society refers colloquially to people who work part-time as *freeters*, which is a term that combines the English word *free* and the German word *arbeiter*, or “laborer.” Freeters make up a flexible pool of labor once deemed necessary to meet the shifting demands of industry under Japan Inc. When the recession began, this flexibility became a liability, and freeters became victims of the first job cuts when companies scrambled to balance their budgets. If corporations represent postwar Japan during the 1980-1990s, then freeters, with their lifestyles oriented around consumption and the rhetoric of choice, epitomize the newer national trend towards neoliberalism from the 1990s and onward (Lukács 2010: 170).

Currently, public opinion implicates freeters as partially responsible for perpetuating the fiscal crisis. Such scholars as Masahiro Yamada also cast youth as self-centered, unwilling to work hard, and unable to subordinate their personal interests to the economic project of “Japan” (Lukács 2010: 160). Apart from practices of consumption, however, youth are largely barred from meaningful participation in the economy that would provide them opportunities to demonstrate selflessness, hard work, and commitment to a larger cause.

### Generational Conflict

Tomiko Yoda locates generational conflict as one of the most significant social tensions in contemporary Japan, and indeed part time work represents a contested site where young men display their lackluster commitment to older models of masculinity (2006b: 42). While young men’s rejections of full-time work are at least partially forged in the sober reality of a weak job market, they are also reactions against the salaryman ideal and conservative gender ideology. Young men do not want to be like their fathers, and they make this abundantly clear. These

strategies include an emphasis on consumption-based lifestyles and the use of beautification technologies.

According to Laura Miller, young men's interest in their aesthetic and sexual appeal indicates that, "the ideological sphere of reference of masculinity has widened to include a greater diversity of physical styles" (2006: 126). This does not amount to the feminization of men, but a "shift to beautification as a component of masculinity" (Miller 2006: 126). For Miller, young men employ beauty as an appeal to female desire, a tactic for overcoming women's reluctance to date, and a means of distancing themselves from their father's masculine identities. The generic older man is commonly depicted as squat, balding, and frumpy in his ubiquitous, uniform-like business suit. Indeed, westerners often describe salarymen as the identically looking, identically thinking automatons that drive Japanese industry. For this reason, Miller suggests young men's attention to grooming is a creative act of resistance that highlights their individuality by setting their bodies apart, marking them as unique.

## Chapter Two: The Commodification of Knowledge about Herbivore Boys

In this Chapter, I examine the writings of Maki Fukasawa, an editor, columnist, and the representing director of a marketing consultant group, and Masahiro Morioka, a Professor of philosophy and ethics at Osaka Prefecture University. Both are figures who shaped the direction of *sōshokudanshi* discourse: Fukasawa coined the term *sōshokudanshi*, while Morioka is currently the most cited authority on the subject, for reasons that I will shortly discuss. Yet here, the strict content of Fukasawa and Morioka's books and articles takes a backseat to the argument that *sōshokudanshi* discourse is a site where knowledge is commodified. In examining how information about herbivore boys becomes a resource to be bought and sold, I further uncover how the production of knowledge in *sōshokudanshi* discourse reflects vested patriarchal interests. I argue that despite his position as a professor, and not as a formal salaryman or corporate worker, Morioka epitomizes the beliefs and values associated with salarymen under Japan Inc., and that salaryman ideals inform his approach to *sōshokudanshi* discourse.<sup>12</sup>

To illustrate these points, I divide Chapter Two into three sections. In the first, I provide a detailed overview of Fukasawa and Morioka's relationship to each other and to herbivore boys. In the second section, I take a closer look at how Morioka attempts to force Fukasawa out of the conversation, using his position as a professor in order to establish himself as the preeminent authority on herbivore boys. If knowledge is a commodity, then Morioka acts as a cutthroat capitalist by eliminating competitors who have similar access to a limited resource. Finally, I wrap up the chapter by rearticulating how both Fukasawa and Morioka are complicit in turning information about herbivore boys into something that can be bought and sold. I provide some

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<sup>12</sup> In the interest of revealing potential researcher bias, I will be honest: I liked Morioka as a person. He was friendly, engaging, and took time out of his schedule to humor an inquisitive American graduate student. He also went out of his way to refer me to one of his acquaintances. To some extent, my meeting with Morioka shapes my critique of him and his writings. However, I believe that as much as possible, researchers should avoid censoring what they observe in order to put a positive face on something or someone.

brief examples of how this practice is widespread among other interlocutors in *sōshokudanshi* discourse, who similarly treat herbivore boys as an opportunity to turn a profit.

### A Brief Synopsis of Fukasawa and Morioka

This section provides some background information about Fukasawa, Morioka, and the origins of *sōshokudanshi* discourse.

#### i. The Emergence of *Sōshokudanshi* Discourse

In 2006, Maki Fukasawa coined the term *sōshokudanshi* in a series of articles titled “U35 Encyclopedia of Young Men’s Marketing.” Her goal was to teach interested companies about various niche groups and lifestyles among young men. However, shortly after introducing the word *sōshokudanshi*, Fukasawa moved away from the topic. Her discursive absence provided another figure, Masahiro Morioka, with the opportunity to establish his authority on *sōshokudanshi*. Morioka began his debut into *sōshokudanshi* discourse with the publication of “Lessons in Love for Herbivorous Boys.” To teach shy *sōshokudanshi* how to win the heart of their secret crush, the book draws heavily on Morioka’s own life, as well as his alleged insights into “women’s psychology.”<sup>13</sup> According to Morioka, the book also “serves as a practical introduction to gender studies for young people” (2013).<sup>14</sup>

In 2009, Morioka published the sequel “Herbivorous Boys Will Bring Your Last Love,” supposedly in response to the popular demand from young women who wrote Morioka asking for advice on how to date *sōshokudanshi* (2013). The book contains some questionable claims, such as Morioka’s suggestion that Japan’s postwar peace helped produce *sōshokudanshi* by eliminating the soldier as a viable identity and leading young men to seek alternative, non-warrior based “ways of being a man.” His evidence for this claim includes Japan’s low homicide

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<sup>13</sup> Morioka claims he checked with “many women” to see if his conclusions were accurate.

<sup>14</sup> I would hotly contest this claim, and not only because I failed to find a single gender theorist or theory mentioned in the book.

rate among young men, and the even lower rate among older men. It excludes the existence of the “corporate warrior” discussed in Chapter One, as well as the Japanese Self Defense Force and militant far-right nationalist groups.

As director of the “Tact Planning” company, Fukasawa’s job is to teach corporations how to efficiently promote their products to target audiences. In this capacity, Fukasawa originally developed the idea of *sōshokudanshi* as one of several lifestyles that she outlines in her handbook on marketing. In other words, from the very outset, Fukasawa assembled the *sōshokudanshi* lifestyle in order to sell such commodities as alcohol and cars to young men, identifying certain characteristics, and then wrapping them up into a neat package for marketers.

ii. Morioka’s Website: Lifestudies.org

While Fukasawa initially addressed an audience consisting exclusively of marketers, Morioka writes to a mass audience, as is the common practice in Japanese academia, where there is little distinction between scholarly and popular book publications (Takeyama, personal communication, February 27, 2013). His skill at self-promotion and advertising himself is perhaps most visible on Lifestudies.org, a personal and professional website designed to spread Morioka’s name and presence over the Internet, as well as a major part of Morioka’s strategy for laying claim to authority in *sōshokudanshi* discourse. The website addresses two different audiences, and accordingly it comes in two flavors: One designed for Japanese speakers and one tailored to English speakers.<sup>15</sup> Morioka posts significantly more content on the Japanese Lifestudies.org, including copies all of his various writings to date.

The two version of his profile also display inconsistencies elsewhere, including a Japanese account of his popularity among students at Osaka Prefecture University, a brief English interview published in *The Lancet*, and a highly effective twitter feed that elicits interest

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<sup>15</sup> A French version of Lifestudies.org appears to be up and under construction.

and responses from English speakers. Despite being noticeably shorter, the English website is not a direct translation or a mere abbreviation of the Japanese Lifestudies.org, but a separate narrative strategically designed to reach an audience with different assumptions, values, and capacities. This does not mean that the English and Japanese websites lack similar goals; rather, each adapts itself to a different community of speakers.

### iii. Fukasawa Returns

In 2009, Fukasawa returned to the scene with a series of articles in the Nikkei Business Online, the website of a weekly business magazine that not without merit describes itself as “the leading source of business and technology news in Japan” (Nikkei Business Publications 2013). In the thirteen articles comprising “Series 1: Survival Techniques for Herbivore Boys,” Fukasawa takes up alternating positions as a job counselor, advocate, and matchmaker as she addresses *sōshokudanshi* and women interested in dating herbivore boys. She offers concrete, practical advice to young men pursuing the salaryman route: For example, she advises them to learn more about their companies and to develop the skills to effectively communicate their interests and hobbies. She also suggests that young men refrain from expressing their dissatisfaction with unpleasant work, because “honesty and sincerity are two different things” (2009a). Like many of the scholars of Japan discussed in Chapter One, Fukasawa further argues that the diatribes many older men launch against herbivore boys and young men in general spring from older men’s refusal to accept that the times have changed. Instead, despite their lack of efficacy and declining potency, older salarymen cling to the values and forms of masculinity that once flourished under Japan Inc., criticizing *sōshokudanshi* and young men for failing to demonstrate company loyalty or to live up to standards that are increasingly infeasible within post-bubble Japan (Fukasawa 2009a; Fukasawa 2009c). She also suggests that many young men

select herbivorous lifestyles in order to distance themselves from older models of masculinity, a conclusion that this thesis likewise reaches.

Also in 2009, Fukasawa published her earlier U35 articles as the book “A Guide to Men of Heisei Era.”<sup>16</sup> However, perhaps owing to Morioka’s attempts to push Fukasawa out of the conversation (discussed below), as well as the narrow audience she targets, Fukasawa’s book is now out of print. She has not said much on the topic since, save for a single interview in 2011. Fukasawa’s relative silence on *sōshokudanshi* may also be the result of Morioka’s attempts to designate himself as the premier authority on herbivore boys, or it may be that she has simply decided to move on.

#### Morioka’s Effacement of Fukasawa

This section examines Morioka’s attempts to establish a monopoly on *sōshokudanshi* discourse by eliminating Fukasawa as a source of potential competition. It further suggests that age and gender-inflected forms of power operate in Morioka’s effacement of Fukasawa.

##### i. From *Sōshokudanshi* To *Sōshokukeidanshi*

In her forward to the edited volume *Words In Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*, Anna Tsing writes that, “words offer special insight into the remaking of worlds at different scales because they condense past motion in their material form” (2009: 11). Her argument resonates with my own analysis of how *sōshokudanshi*’s synonym, *sōshokukeidanshi*, contains the trace remains of a power struggle etched into language itself. The permutation of *sōshokudanshi* into *sōshokukeidanshi* reveals how complex age and gender-related power relations permeate *sōshokudanshi* discourse. As I will shortly argue, age and gender strongly affect both who is permitted to speak and who is heard, as well as whose interests take precedence in the conversation about herbivore boys.

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<sup>16</sup> Heisei Era (1989-Present)

By no means a neutral or natural event, the advent of the term *sōshokukeidanshi* was guided by an agenda. Namely, the seemingly innocuous addition of the “kei” character to Fukasawa’s original term was both a tactic and the product of Morioka’s attempts to monopolize *sōshokudanshi* discourse. Significantly, the kanji character “kei” in *sōshokukeidanshi* translates as “relation” or “relationship,” and its addition to *sōshokudanshi* contributes relatively little to its meaning, other than softening the tone of the signifier. To be *sōshokukeidanshi* is to be herbivorous or to display herbivore-like qualities, while to be *sōshokudanshi* is simply to be an herbivore. Since *sōshokudanshi* is often used to castigate young men, people who invoke the term *sōshokukeidanshi* implicitly adopt a more sympathetic stance toward the signified, which is likely what Morioka desires, given the way he valorizes and self-identifies with herbivore boys.

Yet contrary to what Morioka suggests elsewhere, *sōshokukeidanshi* was actually not his idea (Takeyama, personal communication, October 26, 2012). On one occasion he lets slip the fact that another party, his publishing editor, was actually the innovator behind the term:

そして2008年4月頃に本のタイトルを決めるときに、担当編集者が『non-no』の特集を参考にして「草食系男子」という言葉を提案したのである。And then in April of 2008, when I was deciding the title of my book, the head editor consulted “Non-no’s” report and proposed the word “*sōshokukeidanshi*” (Morioka 2011)

Morioka never refers to the head editor by name, nor does he ever again mention the editor’s contribution. Instead, he promotes *sōshokukeidanshi* as his term, as well as the term *par excellence*. By substituting *sōshokukeidanshi* for *sōshokudanshi*, Morioka decouples and eliminates one of the most visible links between Fukasawa and herbivore boys, moving Fukasawa from the conversation’s center to somewhere on the periphery. Yet Morioka does not stop here. He further proceeds to lay claim to the public recognition that Fukasawa received when he writes that:



2009 年 12 月に、「新語流行語大賞」(ユーキャン主催)のトップ 10 のひとつとして「草食男子」が選ばれた。In December of 2009, “sōshokudanshi” was chosen for one of the top 10 “Popular Neologism Awards” (sponsored by You Can) (Morioka 2011)

The sentence and its structure suggest that ten words received the honor of “neologisms of the year.” In truth, the word *sōshokudanshi* did not receive an award; Maki Fukasawa and Teppei Koike (no relation) jointly accepted the award in front of roughly a hundred different representatives from television stations, magazines, and newspapers (Jiyukokuminsha).<sup>17</sup> Yet by suggesting the word *sōshokudanshi* attracted national attention, rather than a group of people, Morioka avoids recognizing or admitting the contributions of Fukasawa and Koike—a woman and a young man—to the genesis and proliferation of the term and phenomenon. In the process, Morioka frees up discursive space, which he quickly fills and exploits. When speaking of his book, Morioka remarks that:

My intention was not to create a buzzword. My original aim was to encourage and reassure young boys who were worried [sic] about their relationships with the women they have fallen in love with. (Morioka 2013)

Here, Morioka clearly states that his influence and abilities were directly responsible for elevating *sōshokukeidanshi* to buzzword status. To the extent that *sōshokukeidanshi* successfully displaces *sōshokudanshi*, Morioka effaces Fukasawa’s contributions and place within *sōshokudanshi* discourse.

In this way, the “kei” in *sōshokukeidanshi* represents and condenses a one-sided power struggle between Morioka and Fukasawa over a topic that draws public interest. Today, the terms *sōshokudanshi* and *sōshokukeidanshi* are largely interchangeable, often appearing within the same discussion.

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<sup>17</sup> Teppei Koike is an actor who plays the role of an herbivore boy in a television drama. I suspect that Teppei Koike was added to the ballot because his popularity draws media attention: Koike’s appearance was greeted with the flashing of cameras and exclamations of “Wa—!” from surrounding women (Hashinaka 2009). How can an actor who plays the role of a *sōshokudanshi* receive an award for coining the word? A suspiciously disproportionate number of award recipients are actors or other photogenic celebrities.

ii. Morioka's Other Strategies

Clearly, the transition from *sōshokudanshi* to *sōshokukeidanshi* demonstrates how power suffuses discourse. However, an examination of Morioka's writings reveals many of the other "moves" he makes in a bid for attention and recognition. Significantly, Morioka does not want to share authority with Fukasawa, or anyone else for that matter. He must maintain a monopoly on *sōshokukeidanshi*, he must be *the* expert, a purpose that drives him to undermine Fukasawa's connection to herbivore boys.

To this end, Morioka downplays Fukasawa's authority in his descriptions of her influence. Most notably, in the introductions from "Special Report No.4: on Herbivore Men" and its English version, "A Phenomenological Study of *Sōshokukeidanshi*," Morioka writes that:

The term "herbivore men" (*soshoku-kei danshi* in Japanese) was first coined by Maki Fukasawa, a freelance writer, in an article in a series of essays posted on the Nikkei Business Online website on October 13, 2006. She used the phrase to describe young men who, although they have a general interest in heterosexual love and sex, do not show positive attitudes toward them. *At that time, however, the term did not receive special attention.* (Morioka 2010, emphasis added)

深澤の提唱した「草食男子」という新語は、しかしながら 2006 年の時点ではまったく人々の意識を捉えなかった。However, at the time of 2006, Fukasawa's proposed neologism *sōshokudanshi* didn't really capture people's consciousness (Morioka 2011)

Two issues immediately surface. First, Morioka dismisses Fukasawa as "a freelance writer" instead of crediting Fukasawa with her position as a public figure and the director of a company. Immediately, Morioka questions Fukasawa's authority, with a vocabulary choice that implies Fukasawa is a free-floating writer. By adopting this stance, he attempts to sever her close ties to larger institutions that legitimate her right to speak, such as the prestigious Nikkei Business Online, to which Fukasawa regularly contributes. Probably owing to the fact that Japanese readers are more likely to be familiar with Fukasawa, Morioka gives Fukasawa a little more credit by describing her in Japanese as a *raitaa* or "writer," though still neglecting to mention her position as a director.

By rendering Fukasawa in this light, Morioka makes an implicit comparison to himself. Fukasawa is younger and a woman, both identities that detract from speakers' credibility. In contrast, Morioka is an older man, a member of the social group that Japanese society already privileges in public discourse and daily life. If Fukasawa occupies an unstable position, both as a "freelance writer" and as someone heavily invested in the market economy, then Morioka speaks from the stability of a professorship in Japan's established system of higher education (Takeyama, personal communication, April 3, 2013), itself closely tied to government. If Fukasawa engages in dubious and flexible labor, then Morioka wields authority positively sanctioned by Japanese institutions. Morioka can therefore erode Fukasawa's credibility on the subject of *sōshokudanshi*, with little fear of retaliation, in a way that he would not if Fukasawa occupied a similar position to his own. One can easily imagine that Morioka would be more circumspect if Fukasawa were a professor, male, or someone his age.

Second, Morioka explicitly states in both English and Japanese that people ignored Fukasawa's term when she first coined it. This statement sets the stage for Morioka's later argument that he orchestrated the emergence of *sōshokudanshi* as a social phenomenon, a process that he links with the popularization of the term. As a simple "freelance writer," Fukasawa could not breathe life into the term *sōshokukeidanshi*: Only someone with the authority, knowledge, and insight could transform a word into a category, a phenomenon, and a group of people. Moreover, only someone like Morioka could adequately extract use-value out of the term, something Fukasawa is apparently unable to do despite her job in advertising.

### iii. Morioka the Salaryman

Anne Allison's work provides the key to understanding how Morioka's values and beliefs mirror those of the hegemonic masculinity. Morioka's power trips, his preoccupation with sex,

and his salesman-like approach to selling his scholarship—all strongly mirror the power, money, and sex that Allison describes as preoccupations of salarymen (1994: 197). Morioka's high opinion of his own scholarship leads him both to self-cite and to avoid any mention of how others—particularly women and feminists—have contributed to his thought, even on explicitly acknowledged feminist topics. The sole exception is when women and feminists prove useful for his ego building: For example, Morioka neglects to cite prominent Japanese feminist Chizuko Ueno in his essays on Japanese feminism, yet on Lifestudies.org he uses her review of one of his books in order to enhance its marketability.

Morioka also typifies salarymen in the way he deems it acceptable to dismiss or ignore the ideas of women, even when these women are internationally renowned scholars who are far more published and sophisticated thinkers. For instance, Morioka wrote numerous “esseis” or “essays” on women's studies, including feminism, reproductive technologies, and the modern family—most of which were published elsewhere, but are now also posted on Lifestudies.org (1999; 2000; 2002). Despite taking feminism or feminist topics as their subject, these essays contain negligible or no references to feminists of any sort.

While he explicitly states his support for feminism, Morioka demonstrates his ignorance of feminist scholarship when he employs a double standard. He speaks authoritatively about women, claiming to lay bare “women's psychology” and sexual desires (Morioka 2008: 8). Yet at the same time, Morioka dismisses the idea that women might have anything valid to say about male (hetero)sexuality. According to Morioka, men self-censor their ideas about sexuality around women (1999). Lacking unfiltered information, women can only draw flawed and incomplete conclusions about male sexuality. By openly speaking about women but forbidding the converse, Morioka shows his salaryman colors. Allison's salarymen commit the same offense,

sexualizing hostesses and commenting on their body parts, such as their breasts, thighs, and arms. Yet these same salarymen reject any reciprocal move by hostesses to sexually objectify salarymen (1994: 73-74).

As a knowledge producer in *sōshokudanshi* discourse, Morioka makes numerous statements saturated with rhetoric from the gender status quo, such as the claim that women are simultaneously attracted to and fearful of men with big bodies and muscular physiques. Or that women like smaller men—such as Morioka himself—because their small stature lends itself to a less intimidating aura. These beliefs are tied to the popular beliefs that male bodies are strong, invulnerable, and dangerous, while female bodies are weak, vulnerable, and harmless—both have been widely discredited by feminists, who point out the way such ideas reinforce male dominance (Hollander 2004: 299). Yet they operate in constructions of salarymen as able to endure high levels stress and alcohol, as well as bad diets and a lack of sleep.

#### iv. Commodifying Knowledge

By creating information about *sōshokudanshi* and then converting this knowledge into professional capital, Morioka's writings attempt to improve his professional standing. An opportunist, he takes advantage of whatever topics he believes will produce the greatest yield. The result is that Morioka's scholarship addresses divergent and diverse issues, including brain death, the connection between pain and civilization, men with Lolita complexes, and most recently herbivore boys. The publicity he receives on these topics translates into greater access to resources, which includes students and opportunities, such as his recent invitation to present at the University of Michigan's center for Japanese Studies.

Yet how does Morioka's hegemonic masculinity affect the way he commodifies knowledge? Once again, we must return to the question of who is permitted to speak, and who is

heard. The privilege Morioka enjoys from his salaryman-esque approach to discourse puts him at an advantage when making sales of information about herbivore boys to the Japanese public, just as the structure of capitalism in Japan favors men over women and old over young. Significantly, older men largely control the Japanese economy, occupying the vast majority of ranking positions in corporate hierarchies. While young men occupy marginal positions in the economy, the position of Japanese women is much worse. Statistics distilled from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications show that in 2010, 48.5 percent of women worked in the labor force (compared to 71.6 percent of men), and of these women only 10.6 percent are managers or other officials (Catalyst 2012). The economy is a male-centered domain, though not exclusively a male-centered concern; the effects of an economy in recession are felt throughout Japan.

The foregoing analysis of Morioka as a de facto salaryman begs the question of whether other men commodify knowledge from the standpoint of hegemonic masculinity. In short, they do. Tomonori Morikawa, a Professor at Waseda University who teaches courses on love, questioned whether herbivore boys actually exist. His reasoning relies on unscientific biological explanations: The production of a million sperm in male bodies generates physical (heterosexual) desire, so herbivore boys are lying when they disavow their sexual interest in women (Yamaoka 2011). Morikawa's courses are apparently a favorite among female undergraduates, and like Morioka he appears to derive professional satisfaction from public attention and popularity among students.

Other men also agree that the male body is sexual, and that it must somehow vent this desire. One example is Shin Watanabe, the Chairman of the Japan Cherry Boy Association (JCBA), a group for heterosexual virgins who are actively striving to lose their virginity. JCBA functions as a support group where members share tips and advertise their virgin status, hoping

that women will develop an interest in “popping their cherry” (AsiaOffbeat 2007).<sup>18</sup> Watanabe suggests that in the case of herbivore boys, their apathy toward sex is actually a byproduct of the commercial availability of pornography, which make flesh-and-blood women more trouble than they are worth (Ota 2011).

While not as extensive in her practices as Morioka, Fukasawa is not innocent of commodifying herbivore boys for professional gain. Certainly in her more recent 2009 writings, Fukasawa almost seems to backpedal by explaining that she created the word *sōshokudanshi* because she was fascinated by the implications of herbivore boys for Japan’s future (Fukasawa 2009a). She implies that curiosity, rather than profit drove her interest in singling out *sōshokudanshi*. Yet this new information does not erase the fact that Fukasawa originally intended the idea of *sōshokudanshi* to circulate among an elite and exclusive audience, one with access to the subscription-only content of the Nikkei Business Online. Her “Tact Planning” company creates and sells information to corporations; in this transaction, knowledge clearly becomes a commodity that is exchanged for money. Herbivore boys are but one piece of knowledge that Fukasawa and her company generate for profit, and had *sōshokudanshi* not been widely taken up in the media, the group may very well have remained like the other groups she detailed in her original articles: As profiles that facilitate the commercial exploitation of young men by identifying their attitudes, interests, and consumption patterns.

### A Widespread Phenomenon

Fukasawa and Morioka are not the only “experts” who commodify herbivore boys and sell information to a public hungry for knowledge about *sōshokudanshi*. Many journalists, bloggers, writers, and self-described experts who speak on the topic of herbivore boys similarly seek their share of the returns. Based on their previous history riding the publicity given to other

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<sup>18</sup> After losing their virginity, men immediately deregister from the JCBA.

sensationalized topics, many of these knowledge producers enter *sōshokudanshi* discourse looking to turn a profit. Kumiko Takeuchi, author of *Sōshokudanshi 0.95 no Kabe: Dōbutsu Kōdōgakuteki Otoko Erabi* (Herbivore Boy's 0.95 Wall: Choosing Ethological Men) put out a book on parasite singles, and Arteisia (a pseudonym), author of *Sōshokudanshi ni Koisureba* (If I Fall in Love with an Herbivore Boy), wrote a book on the 59<sup>th</sup> Proposal.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the publication of books about *sōshokudanshi* peaked around 2009, when *sōshokudanshi* received the most press. Solely looking at paperback publications, out of thirteen books on the subject—not counting multivolume comic book series—two came out in 2008, nine in 2009, and two in 2010—strong evidence that 2009 was the prime time to publish on *sōshokudanshi*. Newspapers and magazine articles appear to follow this same trend; the exception is online references to herbivore boys, which are more difficult to gauge.<sup>20</sup> Based on the disproportionate number of documents in 2009 that take herbivore boys as their subject, many interlocutors were evidently motivated to capitalize on the attention given to *sōshokudanshi*. This does not preclude interlocutors from addressing *sōshokudanshi* out of a genuine interest, but it does suggest that this interest was informed by the publicity and sales. For many others besides Morioka and Fukasawa, *sōshokudanshi* discourse is also a site where information is generated, bought, and sold.

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<sup>19</sup> “Parasite single” is a negative label given to unmarried men and women who live with their parents past their twenties. Japanese critics interpret this behavior as a sign of laziness and an unwillingness to grow up, marry, and become “productive” members of society. They ignore the fact that Japan’s expensive housing, coupled with a declining economy, makes living with one’s parents a fiscally attractive option for young men and women who cannot afford a place of their own.

The “59<sup>th</sup> Proposal” is based on a real-life love story involving a career woman who writes a blog about her search for romance. She finds it in her 59<sup>th</sup> dating partner, hence the name. The story initially created a stir on the Japanese social network Mixi, and it was eventually made into a movie.

<sup>20</sup> I tried to do so, but could not find a program such as Google Ngram Viewer that would allow me to count the number of times a word was used in a given year. My sense is that most online articles on herbivore boys date to 2009, but I have no means to measure this. At the time of this thesis, Google Ngram Viewer does not support the Japanese language.



### Chapter Three: The Production of Discursive Scapegoats

In this chapter, I argue that interlocutors create sōshokudanshi as scapegoats and straw men who direct attention away from larger social issues. Sōshokudanshi are only a “problem” because they are constructed as such by people who speak from or to positions of power, including those with the ability to disseminate personal interpretations and views to the rest of society.

Additionally, I illustrate how sōshokudanshi discourse revolves around concerns over Japan’s declining economy, low birth rate, and the deterioration of heteronormative ideals and lifestyles. Indeed, the very formation of sōshokudanshi as an issue reflects the vested interests of mainly older Japanese men who wish the socialization process would seamlessly churn out replicas of themselves. What is at stake, then, is the very definition of masculinity in Japan, and perhaps even whether corporate hegemonic masculinity will continue to dominate in a nation that haltingly but gradually recognizes women’s rights, including the right to work and to maintain an existence apart from men.

Yet even as herbivore boys serve the agendas of older men who are heavily invested in the gender status quo, young men and representations of sōshokudanshi have ample opportunities to derail heteronormativity. Often these opportunities involve performances that reveal the underlying arbitrary nature of gender (Butler 1990: 46). Representations of herbivore boys combine markers of femininity with heterosexuality, but abstain from sex, dating, and marriage. In doing so, they call into question Japanese heteronormative masculinity—with its pretensions to virility and its emphasis on stoicism, perseverance, and hard work—destabilizing the foundation upon which men, particularly salarymen, stake their claim to superiority in Japanese society.

### Straw Men, Discursive Scapegoats

This section argues that herbivore boys are a phenomenon created in order to address the insecurities of Japanese salarymen about the decline of their masculinity and changes in gender norms.

In “Vicarious Language,” Miyako Inoue historicizes Japanese “women’s language,” examining how “teyo-dawa speech”—named for its use of *teyo* and *dawa* utterance endings—served the interests of nationalization as a discursive scapegoat. She investigates how nineteenth and later twentieth century elites displaced their anxieties over the “recurrent Japanese nation-tradition” crisis onto “women’s language” (2006: 168). Namely, in response to fears of westernization and the loss of “traditional” values and ways of life, Meiji-era intellectuals pointed to “schoolgirl speech” among young upper class women as a form of linguistic deterioration that signified the corruption of aristocratic values and femininity. Inoue argues that elites found “schoolgirl speech” unpleasant sounding because it revealed the unstable and conflicted existence of modern Japanese men (2006: 40-41).

At the same time, the schoolgirls who allegedly utilized teyo-dawa speech were silenced even as elites permitted them to speak: According to Inoue, “the epistemic violence of linguistic modernity lies, therefore, not so much in its erasure of what the other is saying but in the exclusion of what the other is saying about what he or she said” (2006: 53). Essentially, it did not really matter for elites’ purposes if women actually spoke teyo-dawa speech. What mattered was the ability of elites to recreate and extract teyo-dawa speech from its contextual moorings, constructing schoolgirls and their speech as subjects through which powerful men could address their concerns over Japan’s modernization project.

The same phenomenon also appears in sōshokudanshi discourse: Whether herbivore boys exist or not is largely irrelevant, at least for the purposes they serve in conversations about politics and the economy. Moreover, young men are also silenced when they are labeled as herbivore boys. The discursive presence of herbivore boys is, for the most part, not of young men's making; sōshokudanshi enter discourse through the words and descriptions of others who use herbivore boys for their own agendas. Namely, in the same way that teyo-dawa speech revealed the insecurities of men in a modernizing Japan, sōshokudanshi reveals salaryman fears over the decline of their masculinity and the gender order under Japan Inc.

By serving as distractions, herbivore boys allow salarymen to temporarily reallocate their culpability in Japan's economic decline and their sense of displacement. Yet the insecurities of salarymen are still present, cleverly disguised by the way discourse itself is conducted: What sōshokudanshi have to say is (re)written when they are spoken about as if they actually speak. When herbivore boys appear in discourse, the performances and utterances of young men are extracted from any original context and recreated on the terms of interlocutors (Inoue 2006: 55). Yet at the same time, herbivore boys—or at least their images—seem to exist as a naturalized category, erasing their discursive construction. This too is a form of linguistic violence, where representations of herbivore boys are presented as if they speak for themselves.

#### Discourse as a Reflection of Salaryman Interests

This section elaborates on the previous section by examining who is permitted to participate in sōshokudanshi discourse, as well as whose interests are represented in the conversation.

Young people are largely absent in the discussion about herbivore boys, lacking access to many of the resources necessary to make themselves heard. While sōshokudanshi are not as widespread a phenomenon as is commonly claimed, there likely exists a small number of young

Japanese men who claim the identity. Yet very few of them participate within *sōshokudanshi* discourse, or at least within venues that receive widespread public attention. Surprisingly few run their own blogs, and few if any write to newspapers, put out books, or even speak publically on the subject. One notable exception is the author of the blog *sōshokukeidanshi no jittai* or “The Reality of Herbivorous Boys.” The blog provides a comprehensive overview of *sōshokudanshi*, including definitions, history, and a link to a “diagnostic checker” that evaluates, percentage-wise, whether one is an herbivore boy.

Instead, *sōshokudanshi* discourse is frequently framed in terms of issues important to salarymen, namely the economy and population numbers. The conversation about herbivore boys does not attend to the interests of other groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people who pursue non-heterosexual lifestyles. Discourse does not address whether *sōshokudanshi* have any bearing on the discrimination against unmarried women over thirty, the stigma Koreans and Taiwanese face as foreigners living in Japan, or the lived experience of members of LGBT communities. Rather, *sōshokudanshi* discourse reflects salaryman concerns. It criticizes *sōshokudanshi* for their alleged unwillingness to become “productive” members of society, to marry, settle down, and reproduce; it censures young men for their lack of loyalty and singular, unquestioning commitment to a company.

*Sōshokudanshi* discourse even judges herbivore boys for their consumption patterns. *Sōshokudanshi* are consumers, but not the kind of consumers that various entities in the Japanese economy want or expect. For example, herbivore boys are uninterested in the power and speed of sports cars, which frustrates domestic car manufacturers who rely on young men to sustain the Japanese car industry (Ushikubo 2008: 34). While they may patronize sweets shops, buy designer clothes, or use cosmetics, critics tend to ignore these consumption practices. Instead,

they focus on the non-heteronormative nature of these behaviors, rather than how stereotypically feminine activities impact the economy.

### The Failed Reproduction of Heteronormativity

This section investigates some of the ways in which sōshokudanshi discourse remains marked by conservative gender ideology, but also points out how young men and representations of herbivore boys resist and contest salarymen masculinity through performances that problematize gender binaries. Ironically, even though herbivore boys enter discourse in the service of interlocutors with conservative agendas, their representations expand beyond their original uses and ultimately return to contest heteronormative ideas about masculinity and gender.

#### i. A Zero Sum Game

Sōshokudanshi discourse remains marked by conservative gender ideology, as is evident in the way knowledge producers treat masculinity and femininity as part of a zero sum game. To begin with, interlocutors uncritically accept the cultural construction of femininity as masculinity's converse; what is masculine is not feminine, and vice versa. A loss of masculinity is therefore a gain in femininity. To the extent that herbivore boys have become less masculine and more feminine, Japanese women have become more masculine and less feminine. Such is apparent in the existence of nikushokujoshi or "carnivore girls," the counterparts and *hantai* or "opposite" of sōshokudanshi.<sup>21</sup> Where herbivore boys are sexually passive, carnivore girls are sexually active. Where herbivore boys lack the motivation to advance their careers, carnivore girls are driven to achieve success.

At the same time, by problematizing the cultural linkage of certain characteristics with male or female bodies, sōshokudanshi and nikushokujoshi question the naturalness of gender

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<sup>21</sup> Nikushokujoshi are not the complete opposite of herbivore boys. For example, both carnivore girls and herbivore boys are typically depicted as young and urban-based.

categories. Men are not inherently aggressive, nor women inherently self-effacing. However, this swapping of traits does leave in place traditional gender binaries. Herbivore boys and carnivore girls stretch, but do not break away from the respective categories of “men” and “women.” As part of a zero-sum, they exchanged gendered traits, but never share them. Thus, herbivore boys and carnivore girls remain within the boundaries of gender binaries, rather than completely transcending them.

ii. Heteronormative Time/Space

Popular depictions of *sōshokudanshi* and *nikushokujoshi* reinforce the gender status quo. Namely, *sōshokudanshi* discourse is a site where interlocutors bemoan and criticize the refusal of young men and women to live up to the timeline set by heteronormative masculinity and femininity. Society expects Japanese men and women to pass through specific, non-negotiable life stages—such as education and marriage—each of which is associated with specific activities and interests. Judith Halberstam calls this “heteronormative time/space,” or naturalized understandings of time and space in relation to sexuality (2005: 10). Heteronormative time/space provides a guiding logic that organizes expectations and practices within society (Halberstam 2005: 6).

When people fail to perform within the bounds of heteronormative time/space, they risk social sanctions, though the severity of these sanctions varies based on a number of factors. For example, unmarried Japanese women over thirty are deeply stigmatized in a way that unmarried Japanese men are not. Junko Sakai illustrates this in *Makeinu no Toboe*, a book that discusses *makeinu* or “loser dogs”: Childless, unmarried women who have supposedly “lost out” on heterosexual marriage and are no longer desirable due to their age.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A Japanese saying compares women to Christmas cakes, best “eaten” on the 25<sup>th</sup> and not after.

To some extent, sōshokudanshi's existence outside heteronormative time/space challenges the gender status quo, as does their refusal to conform to the strictly delineated life stages that Japanese society sets out for them. Journalists, bloggers, writers, and self-described experts debate whether young men's repudiation of heteronormative time/space will impact Japan's population, with most arguing that young men and herbivore boys are directly responsible for Japan's low birth rate (Nikkei Biz Academy 2009; Nikkei BP 2012). According to this logic, their disinterest in marriage and sex means that herbivore boys will not have children, which poses a population problem for a rapidly aging society (Statistics Bureau 2012: 14-15).

By focusing on sōshokudanshi, interlocutors ignore or shove aside the concrete factors—such as Japan's recession and gender inequalities—that make the freedoms of a single, childless lifestyle attractive for many young people, not just sōshokudanshi (Fogarty 2007). Youth are realistic about economically and socially viable lifestyles, and this may lead them to spurn the cultural mandate that they marry and have children (Honda 2006: 156). Yet too often public discourse paints youth as simply rebellious when they decline to follow heteronormative time/space, instead of portraying them as informed actors who select lifestyles based on preference, albeit tempered by socioeconomic and cultural conditions. The subversive potential of a performance is especially great when, rather than blundering into non-heteronormative lifestyles, young men and women survey the dominant gender constructs, find them wanting, and opt for creative new ways of enacting gender.

### iii. Performativity and Gender Equality

As Judith Butler argues, performances are “acts, gesture, and desire [that] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body” (1990: 185, emphasis author's). Performances reveal the makeshift nature of identity, the self, and other

social constructs such as heterosexuality. For Butler, performance is at its most potent in drag, a parody that denaturalizes gender and hegemonic heterosexuality.

Discourse often depicts sōshokudanshi as engaging in drag and drag-ish like activities, such as wearing bras and skirts, or using parasols to protect their skin from the sun in order to achieve a pale complexion (Asahi Shimbun 2009; Fukasawa 2009b). More often, herbivore boys are depicted as thin, bespectacled, fashion-conscious young men (SōshokukeidanshiKenkyūkai 2009). Instead of robust physique or a disheveled appearance, sōshokudanshi appear well groomed and even androgynous.

As a performance, androgyny has the potential to problematize cultural preconceptions about gender. In her book *Takarazuka*, Jennifer Robertson defines androgyny as the mixing of gendered markers in a way that problematizes, but does not entirely overturn gender binaries. As aspects of gender binaries are swapped and combined, many retain their older signification as masculine or feminine (1998: 47-48). By pairing an androgynous appearance with heterosexuality and “feminine” activities, representations of herbivore boys reveal the arbitrary way in which certain performances are linked with certain bodies.

Sōshokudanshi may be a label imposed on young men in order to enforce heteronormativity, and the interlocutors who discursively construct herbivore boys may occupy privileged positions that could be damaged by changes in the gender status quo. Yet even as interlocutors attempt to label, define, and thereby manage and control young men through sōshokudanshi discourse, there is always some slippage: When people express ideas their ideas within discourse, they have no guarantee where or how these ideas will end up (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 92). Utterances, statements, and arguments can be taken up and used by others in ways that differ from the intentions of their original speakers. This is evident even in



the very beginnings of sōshokudanshi discourse, when Fukasawa's marketing category became a social concern that earned national attention.

Herbivore boys and other interlocutors also appropriate criticisms, turning them into something positive. Take, for example, the discussion depicting herbivore boys as incapable of striving for or achieving full-time employment. According to the dominant line of thought, herbivore boys must settle for part-time work, often regarded as employment for males who fail at being adult men. Yet according to one of the few self-identified, albeit atypical herbivore boy, sōshokudanshi value part time labor because full-time work involves high levels of stress and competition (www.so-shoku.net 2013). Yes, this herbivore boys says, we are not full-time workers, but only because we choose not to be. He offers the personal example of when he turned down an offer to transition to full-time status, simply because it did not suit his purposes and the lifestyle he wants to lead. This herbivore boy earned full-time employment, was offered it, and refused. Full-time work was not an issue of capability or willingness to work hard, but—according to this man's rhetoric—of choice, a priority of Japan's younger generations that value flexible lifestyles.

Thus, as much as older Japanese men attempt to contain the non-heteronormative performances of younger men through discourse, their words are not set in stone. There is always room for maneuver, and some excess always escapes. This excess may effect real changes. For example, salarymen may see young men eating in sweet shops and cry "sōshokudanshi!" Yet in publicizing that young men engage in this stereotypically feminine activity, interlocutors contribute to the awareness that such occurrences are increasingly common, which in turn lessens its stigma ever so slightly.

Excess is by definition difficult to capture, making it difficult for researchers to trace how small amounts, applied over a period of time, create changes in larger social arenas and constructs. Many of the shifts it instigates are also gradual, further increasing the problems of definitively linking excess to change. However, not all excess is difficult to pinpoint. The sensationalization of bras as part of the herbivore's wardrobe created a demand for men's bras, to the point where an actual market emerged, along with brand name bras such as WishRoom and Men'sWISH. While the widespread adoption of women's lingerie by Japanese men is unlikely, wearing a men's bra is a performative statement—whether someone sees the bra or not—that plays with and parodies gender binaries. Through every such performative act, the closed definitions of masculinity and femininity open up a little further. As these small subversive moments accumulate, the definition of masculinity stretches, growing increasingly dissimilar—though never ahistorically separate—from the masculinities that came before.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings

In conclusion, herbivore boys represent the latest alternative masculinity among a younger generation that increasingly values flexible lifestyles and creative choice. Yet unlike such other alternative masculinities as SMAP and hosts, *sōshokudanshi* exist almost entirely in the realm of discourse, though their behaviors are grounded in actual behaviors and trends displayed by young Japanese men.

In this thesis, I have argued that *sōshokudanshi* became a discourse because journalists, writers, bloggers, and self described “experts”—including Maki Fukasawa and Masahiro Morioka—promoted and sensationalized the topic in order to capitalize on the public interest and concern surrounding trends in young men’s behavior. While some saw herbivore boys as a chance to further their careers, others attempted to make money by capitalizing on media attention, though the two motives are not mutually exclusive.

Additionally, I have suggested that *sōshokudanshi* serve as discursive scapegoats that older men in Japan blame for a number of real and perceived social ills. These include the fall of hegemonic masculinity, Japan’s economic stagnation, and the declining birthrate. In contrast to the conservative and heteronormative ideology of the nation’s older (male) generation, discourse connects herbivore boys to creative lifestyles and the rhetoric of choice.

Ultimately, herbivore boys demonstrate the way in which knowledge is produced to serve the vested interests of mainly older men who continue to occupy privileged positions in Japan’s economy. At the same time, *sōshokudanshi* demonstrate how the meaning of a discourse can slip beyond the control of its creators and participants. While herbivore boys may not exist as a

population, as representations within discourse they ever so slightly change what it means to be a Japanese man.

### Improvements and Future Directions

This project could benefit from many improvements, including an increase in my Japanese language proficiency. As of this thesis, I have taken roughly three years of college-level Japanese, including two trips to Japan for the purpose of learning the language. My speaking, reading, and writing skills remain limited, and they shaped the avenues I could feasibly pursue during my two years as a Master's student. Ideally, if I were to return to this project, I would do so with a better grasp of the Japanese language, allowing for increased sophistication in my search for sources, greater depth in my analysis of current sources, and a higher quantity and quality of communication with potential informants.

Additionally, I would make a greater effort to incorporate women's voices, such as by contacting and arranging interviews with the many women who post comments about dating sōshokudanshi. Maki Fukasawa is by no means the only woman to participate in sōshokudanshi discourse, and aside from older Japanese men, young women appear to be some of the most interested and enthusiastic commenters on the subject, though they have yet to definitively break into the insulated conversation about herbivore boys. I would also devote more time to discussing the role of the state and its relationship to Japan's market economy. Specifically, I would explain in greater detail exactly how the male-centered configuration of both structurally privileges older heterosexual men over women, LGBTs, and youth.

I could make other improvements to this project by spreading my net wider, trying harder to capture the discrete and isolated number of self-identified herbivore boys who make their presence known, usually online. While I attempted to contact each of these self-identified

sōshokudanshi, I did not receive any replies, and failed to pursue the matter further. If I were to redo this project with better Japanese language skills, I would use my profile on the Japanese social network Mixi to elicit interest and participation for my research.

In my future research, I hope to this study herbivore boys and incorporate its findings into a larger investigation into Japanese masculinity. While I do not plan on continuing with an exclusive focus on sōshokudanshi, I am currently considering a project that examines displays of male heterosexuality within the context of dating. If I proceed with this inquiry, herbivore boys could provide a foil against which I might juxtapose conventional understandings of Japanese male heterosexuality.<sup>23</sup>

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